

Lord Mayor Jane Lomax-Smith
City of Adelaide
GPO Box 2252
Adelaide SA 5001
By email: city@cityofadelaide.com.au

Dear Lord Mayor Lomax- Smith

Local government elected member conflicts of interest

I am writing to you due to my concern regarding elected member conflicts of interest across the local government sector.

I have recently published a [statement](#) on my website, noting that in the first half of the 2025-2026 financial year, I have completed and published a number of investigation reports involving contravention of the conflict-of-interest provisions in the *Local Government Act 1999* by elected members. This continues a trend I observed last year and causes me great concern. A copy of my statement is **enclosed**.

I wish to particularly note that I have published two investigation reports and a summary statement on a formal resolution, specifically in relation to members failing to declare material conflicts of interest for their attendance at the 2025 Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) National General Assembly held in Canberra. This is in the context of members' travel and other costs being approved and paid for by the council. In a number of these matters, it appears members may have failed to recognise the conflict because the travel was connected to their role as a council member.

I reiterate that conflicts of interest, as defined in the Local Government Act, may arise where even when the interest is related to an elected member's public position as a councillor, including their attendance at a conference or other event. It is important to observe the provisions of the Act, and ensure such conflicts are properly declared and managed.

I also draw your attention to the view expressed in my 2024-2025 Annual Report, that breaches of material conflict of interest provisions will be investigated by my Office unless there are exceptional circumstances that warrant a resolution approach.¹

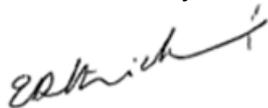
I request that you share this letter with the elected members, and that it be tabled at a public meeting of the council.

On 27 February 2026, I will be presenting to Mayors and CEOs at the LGA President's webinar, providing an overview of the work of Ombudsman SA, complaints about integrity breaches, and recent investigations into alleged breaches of conflict-of-interest provisions. I encourage you to register for the webinar at www.lga.sa.gov.au/forms/events-and-registrations/upcoming-lga-workshops-forums/lga-president-webinar-ombudsman-sa-briefing.

¹ *Ombudsman SA Annual Report 2024-2025*, p.29.

If you wish to discuss the report or the conflict-of-interest webinar, please contact Evlynn Hayes, Manager, Corporate, Intake & Engagement in the first instance on (08) 7322 7020 or hayes.evlynn@ombudsman.sa.gov.au. I hope that this information is useful to you.

Yours sincerely



Emily Strickland
SA OMBUDSMAN

12 February 2026

Cc Mr Michael Sedgman, Chief Executive Officer
Encl Conflict of interest statement



Public Statement – 11 February 2026

The South Australian Ombudsman issues a reminder to local government council elected members on their conflicts of interest obligations

Elected members play a vital role in representing their communities and shaping council decisions that affect those communities. Given the nature of community representation, elected members will have personal, professional or financial interests and connections within their local area. From time to time in the course of contributing to council decision-making, these interests will conflict with the interests of the community. There is nothing inherently wrong with having a conflict of interest, but it is vital that public officials declare and manage conflicts appropriately; failing to do so undermines trust in government decisions, compromises the integrity of decisions and can escalate to more serious issues including corruption.

The *Local Government Act 1999*¹ is clear about what constitutes a conflict of interest for elected members and the steps elected members must take to ensure such matters are managed transparently and effectively. Alleged breaches of these provisions may be the subject of complaints and reports to my Office.

In my most recent Annual Report, I raised concern that there had been an increase in allegations of integrity breaches by elected members including an increase in alleged breaches of the conflict-of-interest provisions. In the first half of this financial year, I have investigated and made findings in seven matters involving contraventions of the conflict-of-interest provisions in the Local Government Act. These trends are cause for concern.

I reiterate the following regarding my approach to such matters:

... While the Ombudsman considers it may be appropriate to resolve first-instance breaches of general conflicts of interest through agreement, breaches of material conflict of interest provisions will be investigated unless there are exceptional circumstances that warrant a resolution approach.²

I remind members that, at the conclusion of an investigation, I can make recommendations under the Local Government Act including requiring the council to suspend a member from any office under the Act or ensure a complaint is lodged against the member with SACAT. It is incumbent on elected members, as public officials, to understand their obligations to declare and appropriately manage conflicts of interest in accordance with the law. Where there is doubt as to whether there is a conflict or the nature of the conflict (material or general), I encourage members to consider erring on the side of caution.

¹ [Local Government Act 1999](#)

² *Ombudsman SA Annual Report 2024-2025*, p.29.